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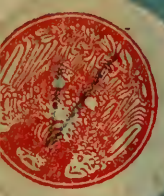
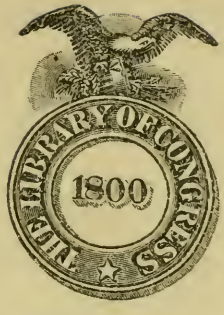


VERSES TO A BABY

GRACE D. E. RICHARDSON



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VERSES TO A BABY

BY

GRACE D. E. RICHARDSON

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By G. D. E. Richardson

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M. E. R.

Of whom this little handful of verses was written long ago.

I.

A roseleaf lies the baby on her breast,
Curve following curve, the answering hearts
close pressed,
Sorrow is past, the birth pangs are at rest.

The little fingers round her own are fast;
Ah God, could mortal mother guide her past
This world of pitfalls into peace at last!

II.

When through the mystic marches of the years
A vibrant message, low but clearly ringing,
Caught my still heart across the pulsing spheres,
The many lighted stars themselves were singing.

Like swift flames came the message through
the night,
Like beating seraph wings the dark air cleaving,
Like a vast radiant web of amber light
From cunning loom, far beyond mortal weaving.

"Be thine oil fragrant and thy garments fair;
Behold One cometh! Let thy light be burning;
Houseless this Stranger if thou be not there;
Watch, and faint not, the day will ease thy
yearning."

Pale with the watch and with the soul's long
fast,
Bewildering sweet at daylight's early dimming,
A cry, new-born, fruit of the vigil past,
Joins the deep music that Love's choirs are
hymning.

Now endless joy with breathless rapture rife
Drives sorrow forth. Now Love's great tides are
surging,
Proud and sweet waters of the Sea of Life,
Ourselves and thee in its vast ambient merging.

III.

Pain that I bore for you was pain exultant;
O blessed Dolor that did set you free!
Love that I have for you is love transcendant;
O gentlest love, whose rise is mystery.

In the green fields of June I heard your heart-
beat,
Low, but above the song of many birds;
Sweeter than music of the harp ecstatic,
Softer than evensong's most holy words.

Through the rich summer of your fair fruition,
Through the ripe beauty of the flaming year,
So came you to the day of your fulfilment,
The day of glorious wonder and sweet fear.

Now are you safe within our arms expectant,
Now is the tender beauty of you seen;
A roseleaf flushed, of the divinest texture,
A priceless pearl of fairest roseate sheen.

Each little limb in perfect beauty moulded,
No gracious curve of your sweet body missed,
Surely the angels must have drawn such outlines,
The Sons of Morning your sweet lips have kissed.

So have we touched the hem of Love Triumphant,
So have we walked the path of sacrifice,
So are we gods because we know creation,
So are we suppliants praying with shut eyes.

IV.

O Mary, mother of a little child,
Thou hast not said if thou didst love him just
In this same aching-sweet consuming way
We common mothers must.

Thou hast not told if those slow-threaded days,
While he was hid with thee, heart under heart,
Tissue of thine, life in thy life enshrined,
Were holy-days, apart.

Nor if that rapturous thrill, immense, profound,
Shook thy soul's city when he first was laid,
No gift of answering love, within thine arms,
O Mary Mother, Mary Maid!

O blessed Mother! In thy quiet eyes
We read no vision of the bleeding cross;
Hadst thou no foretaste of immortal pain,
Or of thy mortal loss!

V.

Of all the angel-children that I know,
Raphael's, and Rubens', Titian's, and the rest,
None are as little and as young, and so
You will stay here and make your mother blest.

Yes, I have seen them in their circling sky,
Dear little smiling things, as you can smile,
And wonder-eyed, and grave like you and shy;
But they had been on earth a longer while.

Except, for I do speak but truth to you,
That your clear eyes may know of mistrust,—
So I must tell that Perugino drew
Around his throned Madonna, babies just

As little and as young, my Sweet, as you,
Who never had a birthday here on earth;
All prism-winged they are, but angels too,
The little children of the heavenly birth.

But he is only one and could not know;
Raphael, and Rubens, Titian, and the rest,
Left such as you in mothers' arms, and so
I hold you closer to my happy breast.

VI.

Oh darling, on adoring knees I kiss them,
The little unshod feet;
Not even to the mighty turbaned Magi
Could worship be more sweet.

When Syrian shepherds found the starlit
manger
And shining angel guards,
Your little brother Christ stretched out to bless
them,
His baby hands, unscarred.

Your little holy hands bless me, your mother,
By morn and night and noon,
And joy that passeth all man's understanding
Floods like a radiant moon.

VII.

When first your eyes looked into mine,
You little Wonder-thing,
The Spring awoke, the small birds sang,
All round the world the great bells rang,
For Love had crowned her king.

When first your darling rose-stained hand
Strayed to my bended head,
No mitred churchman's signet gage,
Saint Peter's splendid heritage,
Such blessings rich could shed.

When first your new-waked questioning soul
Unbarred its fluttering smile,
Your sweet lips' portal seemed a shrine
Where little stars their garlands twine,
Forgetting heaven awhile.

VIII.

Who so sweet and who so strong,
Who so blithe, and maybe
Who has a will and a way of her own
To equal this treasure-baby?

Who has dimples in every nook,
Who has smiles to match them,
Whose eyes are windows of sun-flecked gray
With curling fringe to latch them?

Who has amber hair so sheen,
Whose rosy tongue can chatter
The dearest nonsense that ever was heard,
As if 'twas the wisest matter?

Who so dear, so dear to hug,
And what has life to equal
The flower-sweet kisses on neck and knees,
And the last little toe of the sequel?

IX.

Up, up, and in your saddle!
Up, up, and race away!
For now has come that best of times
In all our busy day.

Your mount is at the dooryard,
Come, let me toss you up;
Don't stop to clasp that pricking spur,
Or taste the stirrup cup.

Look, now he's wildly champing,
The grooms can't hold him in;
Come, do not wait for crop or whip,
For you must have your spin.

There, now you're off; now steady,
Now settle to your pace;
Between the walls of roses red,
I catch your smiling face.

Here, draw rein at the toll-gates,
They'd never do to miss,
The first is at the window wide,
The next is for a kiss;

Last comes the old, old mirror,
Ere we reach little bed;
It never in its hundred years
Showed such a darling head

Or sweeter body, soft and fair,
In dear content close pressed—
Far-away smiles, and drowsy eyes—
Against her father's breast.

X

Who's this enchanting water-sprite!
This wanton in her ocean tub!
Did ever little mermaid wight,
Risk such a drowning for a scrub?

She challenges so archly gay
Beneath her showery rainbow veil,
Such porpoises as round her play
To join her in a reckless sail.

The soap and soap-dish (jolly tar)
Are off again for Sandy Hook,
We'll overtake them at the bar,
And bring them back by book and crook.

The bubbling ball has caught the tide,
Farewell, farewell, her gallant crew!
She's straining for the ocean wide,
Heigho! Heigho! She's lost to view.

Come weigh our anchor, scrub is done,
You rogue! you'll bring the tub in too?
Diogenes would share his sun
For one philosopher like you!

XI.

And do you think
The roses on the wall,
This one so pink
And this so tall,
Or that tiny blush one,
Not half as sweet as you,
Will keep our little secrets
Hidden out of view?

For if they told,
As other flowers might,
Of our kisses bold,
What a shocking plight!
Or if they should whisper
Your hundred little names,
Those very dear and queer ones,
Why, there's the Court of Claims!

But they do know,
Those roses on the wall,
We have told them so,
Pink, and blush, and all,
That your very true name,
Waiting till you're grown,
Is far the dearest, sweetest one
That dearest child could own.

XII.

What a happy dandelion,
With his tousled yellow pate,
For this treasure-baby wants him
As her own play-day mate.

Not in little red round mouth-trap;
If you love him such a way,
Poor frightened little dandelion
Will hardly care to stay.

Feel how silken soft his fringes
Brushing round your peachy cheek,
Ah! you're smiling as he hoped for,
If he played hide and seek.

XIII.

The sun for us has mined this golden day,
For us the bluebird's wing has brushed the sky,
Here on the rose-bound terrace we will stay,
Dear little best-belov'd, her mother, I.

Just she and I and all the world well lost,
Save Love who's watching at the unlatched
gate,
We'll let him in whatever be the cost
And tell him he must loiter with us late.

Down in the garden it is waking June,
See the red poppy lanterns how they shine,
The meadow lark begins his plaintive tune,
His sweetheart listens, happy, so does mine.

And here's the bluff bee grumbling as he goes,
Your wondering eyes close follow his slow
flight,
A highway thief; they count him with their foes
Those glowing roses of our dear delight.

The humming-bird now draws his lightning
lance,
A buccaneer he is and not a lover,
Our little flowers pale before his glance,
Their darling heads they droop and fly to cover.

This world is old and our sweet love is young,
But as you smile at me I wonder whether
Such riftless music, silent yet or sung
Through age-long years, could bind more close
together.

XIV.

Now tell me, do the pixies,
Now tell me if you can,
Do Puck and all his elfin mates,
Those little men in tan,

Come crowding round your pillow
When we're not there to hear,
And whisper these entrancing songs
In your sweet listening ear?

For how else have you learned them,
How caught their merry lilt,
Tell me what are their tuning-forks,
Are their fifes silver-gilt?

XV.

What are you like, my Treasure?
And if I dared to say,
There are not happy words enough
From here to far Cathay.

You are my Easter morning,
You are my Christmastide
And life and love and sun and flower,
All my heart asks beside.

XVI.

Dear little hands and feet
So sweet,
So rose and white
That one could quite
Forget all other things
And Time's quick wings,
To stay and kiss
Were bliss.

Dear little eager smile
Whose lure and wile
Hath caught us in love's net
And debt,
Now arch, now innocent,
Now gleeful, now content,
Such full largess
Doth bless.

Ah matchless sunlit eyes!
In glad surprise
From their soft shelter looks
The fearless soul, nor brooks
A world where pain or sin
Or grief can enter in,
Or blight
Assoil its white.

XVII.

The song of silence in her eyes,
The whispered smile that in them lies,
The love that wears a witching guise,
These mark my road to Paradise.

XVIII.

Rose-sweet the baby lies,
Hushed in her little bed,
Faint hair all halo-wise,
Circling her head.

XIX.

Do I know the bluebird,
Do I know the lark,
Do I know in you, my Sweet,
Love's high water mark?

XX.

Sweet beyond music is your wordless song,
Hid is its meaning like deep jewels at sea,
Lost is the cipher lest we read it wrong,
And break the rhythm of our ecstasy.

XXI.

I don't know how those mothers love
Who are more practised, Sweet;
I only know I love you, from
Fair head to little feet.

And every dimple on the way
Just picks up something more,
Until I wonder how you can
Bear such a heavy score.

XXII.

Although we set the cadence of each hour,
What time sweet lips shall open to the Milky-way,
What time sweet eyes shall close, their fringes fall
Like misty shadows on a cloud-flecked day;

Although, in dear dependence and accord,
She answers to the rhythm our halting wisdom set
Smiles of bewildering radiance and the touch
Of little hands that stir and thrill; but yet,

In that rose garden where her soul is hid,
We may not enter though we vainly pray;
She holds a commune that we may not guess,
A tryst with some fair spirit far away.

XXIII.

When you come back from that dim land and low
Where the pale poppy mists of sleep enfold,
Where its faint borders fade to phantom gold
And all the rainbow colors cease to glow;
When in their stead your own bright roses show
Their joyous welcome through the winter's cold,
Climbing your nursery walls, like lovers bold,
To watch your quiet slumber's ebb and flow;
First wonder wakes, then follows glad surprise,
Then gayest smiles chase o'er your flower-soft face
And hide away in your deep mystic eyes,
To know you are again in this dear place.
So do you tell us, in the clearest way,
This kind old world is where you choose to stay.

XXIV.

Ah could you see, in my deep-chambered heart,
Its inmost altar, sacro-sanct, concealed,
Where lie the holy things we trembling shield
From the quick comment of the jostling mart;
There should you find white-flowering and apart
From all the flexile loves life's ranges yield,
Deep set in sacrifice, by tears annealed,
The love that with your tremulous life had start.
Yours, it is yours, on your dear need it waits,
Nor ever shall its bloom or leafage cease,
But its high service be to lift the gates
Of eager childhood on Life's wider lease;
So shall you see the Vision through the veil,
So join the seekers of the crimson Grail.

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